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SUBJECT: S/I SATTERFIELD DISCUSSES LEBANON/SYRIA WITH  
FRENCH OFFICIALS, 14-15 FEBRUARY 2008

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt for reasons 1.4. (b), (d).

¶1. (C) During meetings in Paris February 14-15 largely devoted to Iraq, S/I David Satterfield discussed Lebanon and Syria at the French Presidency and the MFA. Diplomatic adviser to the French president Jean-David Levitte on February 14 said that France has tried everything but was not presently pursuing any initiatives of its own. Saudi FM Sa'ud al-Faisal had visited recently and consulted on Saudi Arabia's own failed efforts. Levitte said that Sa'ud asserted that Riyadh now knows that it must boycott the scheduled Arab summit in Damascus. He claimed that neither Saudi King Abdallah nor Egyptian President Mubarak would attend the summit if it goes ahead. Levitte stated that France has pressed the EU to prohibit all visits to Syria except by Javier Solana. Meanwhile, France is doing everything it can to support the Lebanese government. PM Siniora will visit Paris in February to sign a 400 million euro agreement as part of the Paris III conference. This is intended to show that political support to the GOL has an economic aspect.

¶2. (C) In addition to a strong political statement of support to the GOL during Siniora's visit, Levitte noted that France is trying to speed up formation of the Special Tribunal. The French have transferred their initial contribution and requested the Saudis and other Gulf states to make donations to cover remaining funding gaps. Levitte understood that this was in train, although there was some confusion as to how to account for the money since the Gulf states wanted their contribution to be more anonymous in not specifying which country gave how much. Experts in New York are working on how to accomplish this. The money, therefore, may eventually be earmarked as coming from "neighbors" or simply the region. NEA adviser at the Elysee Boris Boillon said that he understood the amount involved was originally set at USD 15 million, but he was not sure that was still the case. Levitte offered as well that France would be ready to provide help to the Lebanese Armed Forces "as needed."

¶3. (C) Satterfield said he had heard the Syrians may not care about hosting the summit. Levitte replied that the French ambassador in Damascus believes the Syrians do consider it important even though there are no outward signs that they are preparing for such a major gathering.

¶4. (C) Before concluding discussion of Lebanon and Syria, Satterfield asked Levitte point blank whether there has been any further GOF or Elysee engagement with Syria. Levitte

answered: "No, not since December 31...and there won't be, until their deeds match their words."

¶5. (C) During a February 15 meeting at the French MFA, acting NEA A/S-equivalent Gilles Bonnaud spoke of growing March 14 concern about the continued crisis and of a desperate search for new ideas. Satterfield responded with an analysis of how March 8 and Syria were engaged in a long-term process of weakening the GOL and March 14. He praised as extremely useful France's invitation to Siniora as it will strengthen the GOL and keep the focus of blame on March 8 and Lebanese parliament speaker Nabih Berri. Satterfield agreed that the ongoing impasse was frustrating and a threat to March 14. For the moment, it appears the presidential election will only go forward with Syria's approval. It was fortunate that the February 14 protests marking the anniversary of Rafiq Hariri's death and the death of Hizballah terrorist 'Imad Mughniya were carefully managed to avoid an open clash.

¶6. (U) S/I Satterfield did not clear this cable.

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